

## PARTY BLOOPERS

### Be Sure Not To Politically Correct Others While Socializing

BY RONALD JOSEPH



Bruce Hennes

Photo provided

Chances are, as you ascend your career ladder, one of the rungs contain the following warning: When in a social setting, refrain from discussing religion and politics. Since the United States is in the midst of what promises to be a hotly contested presidential race, the subject of politics is bound to infiltrate your next conversation among friends and colleagues. So what's the politically correct way to broach the subject of politics – keeping proper etiquette in mind?

Whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, a supporter of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton or John McCain, you better have a cursory knowledge of what you're talking about, says Bruce M. Hennes, managing partner of Hennes Communications, a crisis

communications, media training and media relations consulting firm based in Cleveland.

"Some suggest the subjects of religion and politics should be off limits in business situations," Hennes says. "Personally, I don't agree. Regardless, with interest and passions running so high this election cycle, politics is virtually impossible to avoid. The best etiquette is to start with the mindset that your business associate's opinion is deserving of polite consideration – unless they're either a blatant racist or Holocaust denier."

Hennes suggests that you do more listening than talking. Ask questions of others – and take a real interest in their answers. Active listening, where you look someone straight in the eyes while they are talking, nodding your head from time to time and interjecting brief verbal responses, is an effective technique.

If the discussion turns partisan, or when you have no idea what the other person is talking about, you can utilize a method often used by the pundits on television and radio talk shows and take the conversation to the next higher level of consideration. If you're not especially knowledgeable about the immigration issue, you can move the conversation to a discussion about the work ethic in general.

"You don't have to be able to give a doctoral dissertation on any given subject, but before you lob a verbal bomb or interject an opinion, you should be reasonably and responsibly informed," Hennes says. "Your information should come from a wide variety of sources, not just Air America if your politics tilt left or Fox News if you tilt right. In fact, some believe that if you can't argue the other side of the issue, you have no business taking a stand."

Hennes believes the adage "Knowledge is Power" is true. Whether online or in print, being knowledgeable about local issues starts with reading local newspapers or listening to talk radio – not before you hit the sack and turn on the 10 p.m. news.

"Another credible source for local news,

information, and issues is the John Lanigan and Jimmy Malone Show on WMJ-105.7 FM, which airs between 5:30 and 10 a.m.," Hennes notes. "Yes, there's often a lot of humor on the show, but in between the comedy bits you will hear in-depth interviews with politicians, authors and newsmakers that are serious as cholesterol."

Before you find yourself at a cocktail party, fundraiser or business mixer with your back against the wall, Hennes suggests you brush up on politics by reading The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post. He also recommends listening to National Public Radio.

"The writers and editors of those media outlets aren't infallible, which is why you need to expand your journalistic horizons beyond those papers," Hennes says. "Simply put, you will find the best writing and journalism in America in their pages."

Can't get to your local newsstand before heading to the home of your boss for a dinner party? You can keep up with these publications by using the free Google Reader to subscribe to these news sources on the Internet. You will get a single Web page where the latest articles have been aggregated for a quick skim.

Hennes feels, "As a good citizen of Cleveland, you can probably and easily answer a question about the Indians. Don't you think you should know why Obama, Clinton and McCain would be the best choice for president without resorting to an empty slogan?"

The best defense to politely skirting the subjects of religion and politics is always a good offense, Hennes says. He suggests you go into question mode and keep the focus on your interlocutor. If pushed, you can always move to a side subject.

Then again, you can simply agree to disagree. There's nothing politically incorrect with this decision. ■

For more information:

E-mail Hennes Communications at [bruce@crisiscommunications.com](mailto:bruce@crisiscommunications.com)